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Del Mar High School and La Casa de San Gabriel Forge Difference-Making Partnership

Del Mar High School was once a textbook warehouse, not designated for anything other than storing books. Since then, however, it has become a life-saving gift for the students that have come and gone through its classrooms.

“Del Mar is like a family. Everyone here was really, really close,” said 19-year-old Jazzmin Gilbreath. “There are disagreements, but at the end of the day we are a strong family.”

Combined with a partnership with La Casa de San Gabriel, a group which supports troubled children and families, Del Mar has helped provide Gilbreath with career direction. Shadowing a preschool teacher, Gilbreath was asked by a member of La Casa, “What do you want to do with your life?”

Gilbreath said she wanted to teach children. She is now in the process of completing her basic requirements to become a preschool teacher. Del Mar is part of the San Gabriel Unified School District, a continuation school that holds no more than 80 students, four teachers, one principal, a counselor and a janitor.

Success stories like Gilbreath’s are not uncommon for the school, which challenges its students to succeed academically and continue their education to college and find careers of their choice. “Troubled” is by no means the way to classify the kids of this continuation school. Some, like Gilbreath, simply prefer to have closer contact with teachers and a more intimate learning environment.

Principal Lon Sellers said the current vision for his school is to become accredited by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges, giving Del Mar added legitimacy. Combined with the amount of bond money the school received to add two new classrooms and a physical education facility, physical expansion is on its way, thus increasing the amount of services Del Mar can provide the community.

But the school could use immediate help for its students. Some of the kids come from single-family homes. Some live without their parents.

“We always need parents for school site counsel,” said Sellers. “We need input on what the school does well and not well, how to do things that make the school better.”

One source of help is La Casa, which helps provide the school with counselors for teenagers. Because of the economy, however, that support may run out sooner than later. In response, Councilman Kevin Sawkins is running a marathon and giving the proceeds of his donations to the school. He said that it is essential that the kids know that the community cares.

“We want to keep kids from falling through the cracks,” said Sawkins, who noted that the theme of the school is “Where Second Chance Happens.”

Serving the San Gabriel community for close to 65 years, La Casa de San Gabriel has been on the forefront for providing local support to troubled children and families in San Gabriel. For various reasons, the kids in Del Mar High School have helped Del Mar to bring students back to academic success; another reasons

for teens being sidetracked could be because girls become pregnant and teens at too early of an age become single parents.

The money for Del Mar via counseling would go a long way in teaching kids how to deal with those of the opposite sex, violence prevention and sorting problems out through verbal, instead of physical means.